

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Richard Takara

*"She [Mother] worked as a waitress [at Kaimukī Inn]. She worked with her sisters, Yukiko, Kikue, and Kimiko. On special occasions she used to wear kimono to work. I don't know why. On busy days, she used to work morning, lunch, and dinner shift. If she had any extra time, she used to work at other restaurant or soda fountain. As soon as my father came back from Japan, he started to work at Kaimukī Inn as a fry cook. He had a working shift from lunch hour till closing hour, late in the night. Day off? I wonder if we had."*

Richard Takara, second of five children, was born in 1930 in Honolulu, Hawai'i, to Taru and Chiyoko Takara. His father was an issei from Oroku, Okinawa; his mother, a nisei from the Big Island.

Except for years spent in Japan during World War II, Richard, a 1952 graduate of 'Iolani School, received his education in Honolulu. He attended the University of Hawai'i for one year before being drafted by the US Army. Stationed in the Far East, he returned in 1956.

His family has a long history in the restaurant business. In the 1930s, his father, Taru Takara, was a member of a partnership operating Kaimukī Inn. After World War II, Taru Takara as well as his wife, Chiyoko, worked at the restaurant. From 1950 to 1988, the Takaras owned and operated George's Inn.

Richard Takara was involved with George's Inn from the beginning – cooking, cleaning, and doing whatever he was assigned. His wife and all of his siblings at one time or another were involved in the business. Later, Richard Takara managed the restaurant.

Since selling George's Inn, he is retired from the restaurant trade. He is employed by Duty Free Shoppers and resides with his family in Honolulu.

Tape No. 40-14-1-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Takara (RT)

Honolulu, O'ahu

October 17, 2002

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Richard Takara at his home in Honolulu, O'ahu on October 17, 2002. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

So, for the start of our interviews, I'm going to begin with the time of your birth. So, Mr. Takara, when were you born?

RT: I was born, 1930, in Honolulu.

MK: What was your father's name?

RT: My father's name is Taru Takara. But later on he added "George." Since when, I don't know.

MK: What was your mother's name?

RT: Chiyoko Takara. Her maiden name is Chiyoko Uyehara.

MK: Based on what you've been told, what do you know about your father's family and his early years in Hawai'i?

RT: He was born in Okinawa. He had three brothers and two sisters. One of his brothers (older than my father) got married and went to Brazil. My father came to Hawai'i when he was sixteen and he went to the Big Island where the big brother and his wife and family lived. Actually, my grandfather had plans to go Hawai'i with my father, but he couldn't pass his physical test, so Grandma and my father came to the Big Island as *yobiyose*. What I heard, he attended lower grade school with little kids, but he quit and started to work. Grandma worked in the field and took care grandchildren for awhile, but she left to Okinawa.

MK: You mentioned that he had a big brother, what was his big brother's name?

RT: Jiro Takara? I think.

MK: Jiro Takara, possibly.

- RT: I don't know. Grandpa remarried after Jiro was born, and he had five children from his second wife.
- MK: What was your father's family doing in Hawai'i to support themselves? What were they engaged in?
- RT: The oldest brother was in farming business, and my father was working for him. Grandma worked and took care the grandchildren. The farm land was purchased or leased, I don't know. They must have had lots of workers to operate farming. My grandma remembered few foreign language, like "All men *kaukau*" with hand gestures to her mouth. Farming business was doing pretty good. And with that, they moved to Honolulu to open business like eating place, bar, and renting rooms and living quarters around Beretania and 'A'ala area. One of them was Kaimukī Inn.
- MK: So there were more restaurants or bars prior to Kaimukī Inn then? Kaimukī Inn was only one of.
- RT: The main financier was the big brother for investing in business. I don't know in what order everything developed.
- MK: And, your mother's side, what do you know about your mother's family and her early years in Hawai'i?
- RT: My mother's family lived in the Big Island. My mother was the oldest, then Yukiko, Kikue, and the last, Kimiko who was few years older than me and Nancy (my sister). My mother's parents were from Okinawa, so they worked in sugar cane field. Unfortunately, her parents separated.
- MK: And your grandmother?
- RT: My grandmother, as far as I can recall, she lived in Kapahulu with her youngest daughter. She used to take care me and my sister, Nancy. Thereafter, Jane, Helen, and Eddie were born. My parents were very busy with their restaurant business, so after each childbirth, Grandma took care. Grandma really worked hard for my mother. My mother told me about the early days when she and her mother work in cane fields. They had sort of a contract working one row for so much.
- And my grandfather was home most of the time, because of his ailment (arthritis). He started to learn how to treat arthritis with accupuncture (*hari* and *yaitō* with *mogusa*) for himself. Later, he had income by treating others.
- MK: I noticed that your father was issei.
- RT: Issei.
- MK: From Oroku.
- RT: Oroku.
- MK: Your mother was nisei.
- RT: Nisei.

- MK: How educated were they, both of them?
- RT: Hardly any. My father had his education in Okinawa. Maybe about sixth grade. My mother, with hardly any support from her father, she started to work as early enough to go to the cane field. So maybe about third grade or so. Neither Japanese school. Their family moved to Honolulu, and she started to work as housemaid.
- MK: Where did she work as a housemaid in Honolulu?
- RT: Some *Haoles*, rich families. Till today, I never get to know where. Maybe some few houses in Mānoa and maybe some in Kāhala area.
- MK: About when was she a housemaid? After marriage or before?
- RT: Before, and she continued in the early Kaimukī Inn days. She took some extra time for a special occasion to prepare and serve at their houses. Serving food was not just for a family. Serving all the guests, too. My mother learned how to cook, bake, and learned how to serve by working as a maid.
- MK: So did she learn all these food preparations as a maid?
- RT: Yeah. I'm sure it was.
- MK: How much of that did she use in her later businesses? Say at Kaimukī Inn and George's Inn.
- RT: Through all her experiences she applied everything. She trained kitchen staffs to become cooks, chefs, and bakers. She also taught waitresses how to balance the plates with their hands. Just recently, I heard from Tsuneko (my father's niece) that she worked at Kaimukī Inn. Also, her sisters, Haruko and Masako. Seems like, I was always in the way those days. Business was doing good.
- MK: Now that we've started talking about Kaimukī Inn, what do you know about Kaimukī Inn's early history, especially its ownership and management? Who were the original owners?
- RT: That part, I was too little to know. I was only two or three years old. As little as I was, I knew something was wrong in those days. They had meetings going on in the house behind Kaimukī Inn. I still remember Charlie and Toshi were playing with me.
- MK: When it comes to describing the ownership from say the early 1930s to 1940s, how would you describe it? Who would you consider the owners of Kaimukī Inn?
- RT: Well, the early years, it must have been a small restaurant, but doing good. There must have been partners to start off. Big brother, my parents, Haruko and her husband. Tsuneko and Masako helped as waitress. When I was attending St. Patrick's School, my parents were the sole owner. My parents never mentioned about the early years, so I don't want to research any further. I remember renovation and extension went on from time to time.
- MK: Bigger.



RT: . . . took over the next door's business or whatever, they got bigger. The kitchen area was extended to the back for storage and pantry area.

MK: From the 1930s to 1940s, the time that your family left for Japan, who were the people involved in Kaimukī Inn?

RT: In the early 1930s, partnerships were dissolved and thereafter my parents did all the renovations and extensions. Business went very good.

MK: From that time it was your mother and your father.

RT: Yeah, they worked long hours, so they had a place in the back of Kaimukī Inn. But, they also had a room in Kapahulu.

MK: What was your grandmother doing for Kaimukī Inn? The laundry, the linen.

RT: Laundry, linens. The linen was delivered in the morning, and she washed and ironed them. And they had to be all ready for pick-up about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. There were hectic days when the weather was bad.

MK: What was your mother's job at Kaimukī Inn?

RT: She was handling—of course, management. Manager's job is a heavy responsibility on the whole area. She had to cover the dining room, kitchen, and the bar. And cashier, too.

MK: Did you know who was cooking then, if he was in the front?

RT: I was too young those days. I know they had lots of cooks and dishwashers.

MK: Because you were so young, you were born 1930 and the family had the restaurant from about 1930 to '40, how often did you go to the restaurant?

RT: After we moved to Kapahulu, we used to walk to St. Patrick School. Then after school we dropped by at Kaimukī Inn for snack. Then we went to Kaimukī Japanese[-language] School. After school, right back to Kaimukī Inn again. And they asked us if we want something to eat. Then somebody drove us home to Kapahulu.

MK: I was wondering, did you know how come you folks were sent to Saint Patrick's rather than a public school?

RT: Maybe because my parents were deprived of their education. Maybe they could afford. Maybe they couldn't help us with our schoolwork. Later on, Jane was attending St. Patrick's School with us. This way, my parents had chances to meet us after school.

When I was nine years old, my father took me to Okinawa in the summer when the school was out. That was my father's first visit to see his parents, brother, and sisters. My father bought me a suit, tie, hat, and shoes from Sato Clothiers in 'A'ala. And took lots of family pictures. Also, my father had his big brother's family combined in the pictures to show his parents. These pictures were taken by professional photographer. And we tried to look our best with suits for men, and kimono for women. The following year, 1940, my father decided to move the whole family to Japan.

- MK: Before we get into your move to Japan, I was wondering, you mentioned that you would come home from Saint Patrick's School and you would have a snack at Kaimukī Inn and sometimes after you came back from Japanese-language school you'd be asked if you were hungry. In those days, what kinds of food were you folks served at Kaimukī Inn?
- RT: Oh, they had pretty good menu, I am sure. From the way the dining room looked, the menu had to be good with the atmosphere. But, we were not too accustomed to eat various entrées. We knew only Grandma's cooking during those days. It was simple, and she used *shōyu* for seasoning. My favorite was chicken à la king at Kaimukī Inn. They offered lamb curry, beef stew, and stuffed cabbage, whatever prepared for entrées.
- MK: How about other entrées, the appetizers, or their desserts?
- RT: Desserts were similar to what we have these days. I remember they had lots of choices.
- MK: Were there any local type or Asian food being sold?
- RT: Those days, I can't recall any Oriental food or local type. They were more American type, like Yankee pot roast beef, Spanish-style tripe stew, and braised short ribs with pan gravy. Something like that.
- MK: Based on your memory up until you're about ten years old going to Kaimukī Inn, what did it look like? By the time you were ten years old, before you left for Japan, what did the inside of Kaimukī Inn look like?
- RT: I remember the last renovation they had with a big grand opening like. They had those little vases hanging on the wall with those green vines.
- MK: So there were vases on the wall with vines.
- RT: They had no air-conditioning, but they had huge fans on the high ceiling.
- MK: Ceiling fan.
- RT: Ceiling fan, and the entrance had black and maroon glazed tiles on the lower part of the windows. They had a nice colorful star neon sign. And also a neon lobster sign.
- MK: Wow.
- RT: That star used to.
- MK: The star used to rotate.
- RT: Yeah, that's what they had. That must have been something new to the early neon signs in the 1930s. There were no carpets, but nice linoleum floor.
- MK: How about the tables?
- RT: Tables were done by a professional interior decorator, I think. All the tables were placed in booths.
- MK: How many tables do you think there were back then when you were about ten years old?

RT: Oh, by a wild guess, maybe about twenty-five.

MK: Changed?

RT: I haven't been there for a long time. Renovation has been going on from time to time, I suppose.

MK: At that time was there a bar, too?

RT: Yeah, bar. My father used to say that Kaimukī Inn, the liquor display shelf behind the bar, there's a bottle underneath there that he was displaying, it fell off in the back of the bar, somehow, and it's still over there. (Chuckles) So I don't know, seem like they didn't touch much around that area. So, the bottle could still be behind the bar in the back. (MK chuckles.) Must've been a very expensive bottle, I think.

MK: As you were saying, you just remember your parents working there and other hired non-relatives.

RT: Oh, there were relatives. They were related to my mother's side. My mother's cousins. There were few cooks and waitresses from Oroku. Miyashiro-san, was a cook who later opened a market (Miyashiro Market) on Vineyard Street.

MK: Would you remember the names of some of them?

RT: Hardly any.

MK: I was wondering, since you and your siblings were so small, you would go after school, how was your relationship with the workers there?

RT: They were friendly and nice, but they had to watch the bosses' eyes. There is one thing I remember, some of Portuguese ladies who used to work, used to take me down to the park now and then. That must have been their break time, I think. They had a big sliding board over there, at the Kaimukī park. I think they still have the park over there.

MK: Yeah, there's a park there.

RT: They had a sliding board, and we used to slide down over there. I was about two or three years old. I went up there and I was sliding, I tumbled down. And then, was unconscious, (chuckles) was very serious. Yeah, and after that no more going to the sliding board. I must have been unconscious for some time. That terrible experience scared my parents which I could have died from that tumbling.

And then another incident—when I got hungry I used to pick up anything around. Some of those berries or whatever that tree, they used to rush me to the hospital to pump all the food out from my stomach. A lot [of] things were happening. I used to have asthma attacks, too. They were taking me to the doctor lots of times. I remember the doctor's name. Doctor Yamashita.

MK: You mentioned that there was the park near the restaurant, and of course Saint Patrick's School, and up in Pālolo Valley, the Japanese-language school. From your childhood memories, what businesses do you remember being near Kaimukī Inn?

- RT: Barbershop was right on the neighbor, next door maybe. My father used to take me and my sister to the barber.
- MK: How about stores or eating places?
- RT: Around that area had a bakery, Hollister Drugs, Kaimukī Dry Goods. I remember my mother used to take me and my sister over there to buy clothes. Yeah, they had shoes store, too. Few stores down the hill, they had Piggly Wiggly Market.
- MK: How about any eating places nearby?
- RT: I cannot remember. No eating place around the neighbor[hood].
- MK: As young as you were then, say about ten years old, what was your feeling about how well the business was doing?
- RT: Business seemed very good. Very, very good, but the problem was my father was an alcoholic, those days. Sometimes employees [had] to take care of him, so that my mother can run the business. Now and then, my parents used to come home to Kapahulu about two or three o'clock in the morning. My father was drunk and made the house into a nightmare. For real, my jaw and teeth used to rattle from terror. The old-fashioned phonograph we used to have was gone. He turned it upside down with huge noise. Grandma used to calm my father down. My uncles and aunties kept away when such incidents like these were happening.
- MK: So, you're saying then that your parents spent most of their time at the restaurant.
- RT: Restaurant, yeah . . . It was a good thing, my mother never drank.
- MK: The children that time . . .
- RT: . . . was taken care by the grandma.
- MK: . . . with Grandma in Kapahulu.
- RT: And in case that happens, my grandma had to stop that, cool him down. And I still remember he used to beat my mother. I guess those days maybe he wanted to go back to Japan because he had enough money. My mother refused, so naturally, they got into arguments. The business was very successful, but they didn't know how to live a comfortable happy family life.
- MK: You mentioned that you and your siblings grew up in the Kapahulu area. Whereabouts did you grow up?
- RT: This was located someplace in that present Kaimukī High School area. We had several big monkeypod trees around that area. There was a house shared with David's family, my cousin[David Takara].
- MK: Your cousin.
- RT: . . . family. Yeah, facing from the front, the left was David's and the right entrance door was ours.

MK: You mentioned like your cousin David's family lived right next door in the duplex.

RT: Right next door. We shared one toilet. As soon as we enter the door, the toilet was placed in[a] way to share from both side. There was no hand basin. For David's house, poor thing, the dining room and kitchen were right there as you enter the door. They used to say, "Flush the toilet," because they were in the dining room. And that door was not like an ordinary door. They used to—no table—used to just sit on the floor with the low table, have dinner in a small area. They used to bring *futon* out and sleep on the floor, too. But later, we had beds.

MK: In the neighborhood, were there other family members?

RT: Oh yeah, there was another, my mother's sister, next house. That was a two-storied house. The first floor was for garage, laundry area, and storage room.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: You were saying that you had another aunty living nearby.

RT: Kikue, aunty. That's when I was about seven years old, and my grandfather used to visit there. Just next door where my grandma was living (chuckles), but they were separated.

MK: The land that the property the houses stood on, who owned the land?

RT: Seemed like my father. I don't know when he bought, but he started to bring old houses from someplace. Old houses, huge, dragged, with wheels underneath. They were done during mid-night hours to avoid traffic. Several huge garages were built for the tenants. The driveway leading to the houses was laid with white coral sand to keep it solid. Most houses were built into two story, and converted into two units, four units.

MK: He owned the property and developed rental units on the property.

RT: On the property. Roughly seventeen or eighteen tenants lived there. That was a huge change [from] farming to rental business. My father had somebody working for him in the vegetable farm. Vegetables and fruit trees were growing around the rented houses.

MK: Were those vegetables used in the restaurant?

RT: In the restaurant, yeah. It was about two-and-a-half acres land. When we left for Japan, the property and rental houses were sold to Grandma, but unfortunately the government took over because of World War II. After the war, it was settled with the houses they have now at Mōili'ili.

MK: With your parents being owners of a busy restaurant and also having rental units, how active were they in say, community life?

RT: No community life. Nothing like that. Since restaurant and rental business were doing good, my father decided to open *tanomoshi*. A huge *tanomoshi* gathering was done in Kapahulu where we used [to] live. Food came from a Japanese catering company. Lots of

liquor, and foods were placed in beautiful platters. No paper plates, paper cups were used for the guests. In fact, I remember *zabutons* were used. It must have been catered from a tea house. That's the most fabulous party I ever saw.

MK: So he had a huge party when he opened the *tanomoshi*?

RT: Yeah, it was for all the people who were joining the *tanomoshi*.

MK: Generally, would you know who joined his *tanomoshi*?

RT: Well, of course I remember. David's father, Thomas' father, and my mother's two sisters, Aunt Yukiko, Aunt Kikue. Grandma was in the *tanomoshi*, too. My father's big brother's family were also present. Lots of relatives, distant relatives, and people from Oroku came to join. Kids like me were kept away while the party was going on.

MK: So this time that you remember was principally relatives, or were there also non-relatives?

RT: Mainly they were all Oroku people. Within the Oroku people, there are non-relatives and distant relatives.

MK: Your dad did *tanomoshi*, invested, bought property, and was running the restaurant business.

RT: It seems like my father had plans to co-operating in business with my mother's two sisters and their husbands. My parents sold some of their Kaimukī Inn shares to them by receiving their *tanomoshi*. That's how Kaimukī Inn became partnerships.

MK: In those days, your father, did he rely on other financial institutions or primarily *tanomoshi*?

RT: Primarily on *tanomoshi*, yeah. I don't think my parents had bank loans. For running *tanomoshi*, the house gets first with no interest to pay.

MK: What was your mother's role in all of this? How much was her part?

RT: My parents were good partners in many ways to run their restaurant. In some ways, my father wanted to go with more traditional Japanese way. He used to say, "*Wahine* make too much noise, bad luck." Once he decided on something, he wanted his way, and my mother went along accordingly.

MK: I think what I'll do is maybe end for today, and then the next time I come we'll get into your travel to Japan, coming back, and then your early adult life, and then George's Inn. How about that? Okay?

RT: Mmm.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 40-17-2-02 and 40-18-2-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Takara (RT)

Honolulu, O'ahu

October 23, 2002

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Richard Takara at his home in Honolulu, O'ahu on October 23, 2002. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

As I said earlier, we're gonna continue the interviews, and we're gonna start again from about 1940. In 1940, your family left Hawai'i and went to Japan. Tell me why is it that your family left Hawai'i.

RT: Well, we were kind of—it's hard to say why for our young age. We had to just go along with our parents. Maybe my father felt something was happening, like the war might break out, and he'd rather be in Japan.

My mother didn't want that, seems like, but somehow she had a chance to visit Japan with a tour group by herself. After she got back, it wasn't too long, my father started to prepare everything. So whether my mother was going or not, he started to shop and pack. That's how we really rushed to get ready. He took us to Sears Roebuck which just opened. My mother must have been busy training and showing around the business operation for the incoming shareholder staffs. It was my father doing everything, getting ready. He used to take us to Sato Clothiers, to get our suits, and the shopping continued. It was early 1940, I think, when my father said, "Go to school and tell them you folks gonna terminate from school and we moving to Japan."

MK: And how did you folks feel? How did you and your siblings feel about leaving Hawai'i?

RT: We had no choice, and we didn't know which was better. It was my second trip to Japan. We were too young to know what was happening. It was like a whole family taking a vacation trip to Japan on a ship. We were excited in a way.

We got on the Japanese cruising ship heading for Yokohama, and lots of relatives came to see us with farewell *leis*. Some of them were on the ship's deck with us. My father must have been happy to go back home to his family in Okinawa, after all, early immigrants dreamed of returning.

When we got to Okinawa, we had a huge welcome party from the family there. It was almost the whole village people were coming to see us. And were there for quite some time. I noticed, my cousins, Charlie and Toshi were there, too. Grandpa was gone few



years before we got there. As time went by, all the events and out going became more for adults.

We headed to Yokohama, I think. That's where we got off and stayed in a Japanese hotel for several months. Strange, looking back those days, our parents were out for so many days. We were having our three meals without our parents. The hotel maids used to fold up the *futons* in the morning, room cleaning and bring the *futons* out in the evening for us. In the morning we got our breakfasts, a very simple one: *miso shiru* with rice, and they used to serve *nori* with a raw egg and maybe fishcake and pickles came along with it. We were served individually on trays in our room. Table manners? We picked up from the maids. Lunch used to be noodles, so we used to make *musubi* with that *nori* in the morning so that we'd get something for our snack time. We never went no place out of the hotel area. All of a sudden our parents told us that they bought a house in Tokyo, Itabashi area.

MK: Before we get to your Itabashi house, I was wondering, what kind of impression did you have about Okinawa when you went to Okinawa?

RT: Oh, we stayed quite a long time over there. While we were there, my cousins, Koei and Toshio were there with their parents, too. We all went around the island for sightseeing on several taxis. We had lots of homemade food to eat for the day. Living in Okinawa for some time, we saw lots of cultural differences. Like family do not eat together. Children always ate at the lower part, close to the kitchen with all the helpers and maids. The elders were served first for respect. Of course, before that, foods were offered to *hotoke-sama* before each meal. Grace before meal was another custom. Oh, going back to the distant drive we had, Grandma explained to us about the ancient stories which were passed on through the generations. Okinawa at one time, was a country with royal king, *Sho*. Ancient battlefields were kept as historical landmarks. The battles probably were with the Japanese, Satsuma's, those samurai warriors they used to . . .

MK: Invade?

RT: Sort of invasion, so they had to evacuate from their residence and lived in caves. Our ancestors' remains were here, too. So [they] were offered *senko* and prayers.

MK: How did you find conditions in Okinawa compared to what you were used to in Honolulu?

RT: Now that's the exciting part. We never had our father and mother and five of us all together. This was sort of a happy family get-together-like, because we never experienced that when we were living in Hawai'i, so we enjoyed. Surprisingly, we never saw our father drunk.

One more cultural shock. Since there was no running water, they had water from the well and rainwater kept in the huge earthenware pots. The water tasted bad. There were no toilets like Hawai'i. In fact, no electric lights for toilets. Worse yet, the toilets were in the pigpen's area.

MK: And then, at Itabashi, how were conditions there?

RT: We had a big two-story house with *kawara* roof. It was a beautiful Japanese-style home. The interior was exactly like the Japanese hotel where we used to stay. *Tatamis* were placed throughout every room. The yard was upgraded by a professional landscaper.



Seem like a new house. My father had converted the toilet into a modern water-flushing type one. We had two relatives living close by. One was my father's big brother's oldest daughter's family. And the other family was my father's relative. Both of the families' names were Takara. And they helped us to get adjusted in many ways.

Then my father said, "Okay, now you folks are going to school." It wasn't too far from our house, about a few blocks away from our place. My sister, Nancy, got into sixth grade, and I got into fifth. The rest of my sisters and brother were placed accordingly. We sure had a hard time with our Japanese in school. So, my parents had a private tutor to help us for about two years. Thanks to Maeda-sensei, who helped me with my math. Till today, my multiplication is done in Japanese in my head.

MK: So going to school was quite an adjustment for you. It was difficult.

RT: Adjustment, and pretty soon the weather. . . . We had our first experience with snow. (Chuckles) And we found out that *geta* was not too good, because it was hard to walk. You get unbalanced. We were outgrowing from the shoes we had. Leather shoes were very hard to get. We used to have frostbites on our hands, feet, and our ears, too. Once in awhile we used to have shoe rations from school.

The war broke out that winter year, 1941. We had a special news broadcast at our school ground where all the students stood straight standing to listen. That was a shock to know Pearl Harbor was attacked and to be Americans in Japan. My classmates looked at me and started to say, "*Ya-i, ya-i* Yankee *mē*—" (Chuckles) It was very uncomfortable going to school.

MT: When you say "uncomfortable," how were you treated? They called you "Yankee"?

RT: "Yankee, *ketō*," you know? It was kind of confusing. We felt like we were Americans living in a foreign country. (Chuckles) What we used to wear during the winter were suits, my brother was wearing suits to school, too. Later, sweaters. That's when my teacher said, "It's kinda too early to wear sweater. You know it's gonna get much, much more cold." And I look around and I said, "Oh! Nobody's wearing a sweater." (Laughs)

MK: You folks weren't used to the climate, yeah? So other children would call you names . . .

RT: Oh, they used to. Was pretty hard on us. I had one or two close friends but other than that, they were all (chuckles), I don't know. I guess, the way we looked, what we used to wear. And not only that, the awkward way we spoke Japanese to them.

MK: How were your parents treated during the war?

RT: If it wasn't for the war, they were supposed to be enjoying their retirement years in Japan. My parents made friends with the neighbors. They used to have *Kai ran ban*, a newsletter passed around. And *Bokatanshu* air-raid practice, learning how to use fire extinguisher. My mother started to learn tea ceremony and *ikebana* with her neighbor friends. I noticed my mother was wearing kimono all the time like other ladies. And I never saw her in a dress thereafter. My parents adjusted pretty well. We had a little family room where the room was kept warm with *kotatsu*. We used to put our feet in to keep us warm.

That's when my father told us, "From now on, we will use only Japanese at all time." We used to try hard, but he always caught us mixing few words of English in our

conversation, and we laughed. But, before we know, not one word of English came out in our conversations in that little family room. That means we forgot to speak English.

MK: As the war kept on progressing, what were your feelings about the war and about Americans?

RT: It was very hard. We were Americans living in a foreign country. I wondered, "What's going to happen, whether we win or lose?" We were getting to be more Japanese. (Chuckles) Everything was getting to be rationed. It was getting hard to buy sweets, meat, fish, and even *sake*; all food items were under ration. Rice was rationed and my father used to say, "Okay, two bowls only, no third servings, but have lot of *miso* soup to fill up yourself." That was sad. Even *miso* and *shōyu* were on ration. Eventually, *miso* soup had a horrible taste. We couldn't say *mazui*, because he can just tell us "Just go. That's it. Nope, you don't have to eat." So we were all afraid of that and we wouldn't say a word. But we were hungry so we used to eat. When the war got worse and worse, that's when my father sent my two younger sisters and my brother to a country farm to stay for awhile. The air raids were getting more frequent, and that's when my father said, "Oh no!" and they came back. He said, "If we're gonna die we might as well all die together." But later, the elementary school took all the students to a country resort hotel. But that was not too long. They came back because my father found out that they were not fed well.

MK: So were you taken?

RT: No. Me and my sister, we stayed with our parents. As the war got worse, my mother went to Okinawa to get my father's mother. Before we knew, my father's younger brother's family were living with us. My father's two nieces and nephew came from Okinawa. All of a sudden, our house was full. My father decided to move out and had the house rented.

My parents took grandma and all my brother and sisters to Fukushima. My father's brother found a place in Tochigi so he took his family there.

My father's nieces and nephew found jobs in a factory with a place [to] board.

When the war was over, we came back to Tokyo where we lived. We were very fortunate to see our house after all the bombs were dropped in that area. And my parents started to work.

MK: Where did they work?

RT: Someplace in the GHQ [general head quarters], someplace in the officers' club, maybe.

MK: In the mess hall at headquarters.

RT: Mess hall, maybe. My mother used to say, she also worked at Mitsukoshi. It's surprising to see my parents pull through the years during the war with hardly working. Yes, amazing.

MK: You mentioned at a previous meeting that your father at one time was also taken into military service by the Japanese?

- RT: Yes, that was before the war got worse. It was a custom to send off with *sennin-bari*. It had to be completed from one thousand women. So my mother used to take it to the railroad station, (*oyama-eki*), sometimes to neighbor market.
- MK: One thousand stitches for good luck.
- RT: Each stitch meant good luck, and then we made a Japanese flag with signatures from family, relatives, and friends wishing him good luck, that was also given to him. Because of his married status, his age, and with five children, they gave less than a year to serve.
- MK: And so, when the Americans won the war and occupied Japan, your father and mother eventually started working for the U.S. [Armed] forces. But when the Americans first came in, were your parents worried in any way because he had served in the Japanese military?
- RT: No. I couldn't believe myself. My parents never spoke English throughout the war years, but all of a sudden, we had officers and military friends invited to our house, and my parents entertained them in English. Their English [was] unbelievable with good sense [of] humor. The guests were surprised. "Lived in Hawai'i," was probably in their conversation.
- MK: And so your parents ended up working for the U.S. military in the mess hall after the war, and what happened to you folks?
- RT: We were still going school. Yes. Back to school. But, while we were going school we had already contact with our uncles and aunties in Hawai'i and they were sending us packages, sugar, and things we needed most.
- MK: What did they send you? Sugar. . . .
- RT: Shoes. I guess we had our feet marked like this on the paper.
- MK: An outline of your foot?
- RT: Exactly. That's how they got the size. Everybody had their shoes. Wrist watches, sweaters, chewing gums for my mother and sisters.
- MK: And when did you folks return to Hawai'i?
- RT: Somewhere around 1946, on a ship. There were lots of people and family like us returning to United States from Japan. They all had their sad experiences in Japan with them.
- MK: And who came back at that time?
- RT: My mother and five of us. My father came back about a year later, because he was an alien. First thing we registered to enter Island Paradise School. We all started from eighth grade, except my brother in the second grade. Our teacher was Mr. Ernest Hunt. He was a Buddhist priest.
- MK: Reverend Hunt, yeah.

- RT: Reverend Hunt, yeah. Till today, I feel sorry for my brother and sisters, how they struggled to catch up.
- MK: How was that adjustment for you folks coming back from Japan?
- RT: We had problems. During the school, in the class the teacher used to give study period, and then they give us a few minutes for to catch up, like special tutoring, while the rest of the students doing their work. I'm sure my sisters all did the same thing, I think.
- MK: And how did you feel about being back in Hawai'i?
- RT: I was happy, but never missed Japan. My uncles and aunties really took care of us. They really cared. They offered us work at Kaimukī Inn. I worked as a dishwasher, and my mother and my sister, Nancy, worked as waitresses.
- MK: How did you feel about working at that age at Kaimukī Inn?
- RT: I was about sixteen, and I realized my father was sixteen when he first came to Hawai'i, too. I don't know whether my uncle sensed in me that I didn't like to work. Maybe he felt because my father was not a boss anymore. Then he told me, "You should be more enthusiastic about your work." (Laughs) But it was my first experience as working.
- MK: Were you paid?
- RT: Yeah. Twenty-five cents or thirty cents, maybe?
- MK: How about your mother? What was her involvement with Kaimukī Inn at that time?
- RT: She worked as waitress. She worked with her sisters, Yukiko, Kikue, and Kimiko. On special occasions she used to wear kimono to work. I don't know why. On busy days, she used to work morning, lunch, and dinner shift. If she had any extra time, she used to work at other restaurant or soda fountain. As soon as my father came back from Japan, he started to work at Kaimukī Inn as a fry cook. He had a working shift from lunch hour till closing hour, late in the night. Day off? I wonder if we had.
- It wasn't too long, my sister, Nancy, got married to the Takara family in the Big Island. My father worked hard in the kitchen as a cook. Later on, he decided to work in the bar. He was not too happy, because he had no shares in Kaimukī Inn. So in 1950, he had *tanomoshi* and borrowed some money from his niece and got Royal Palm Inn rented. I was twenty years old that year, so I was able to help him. September was the grand opening.
- MK: At the time what school were you going to?
- RT: I was attending 'Iolani in my junior year. I helped as much as I can while going school. It wasn't easy.
- MK: In fact, where was George's Inn located?
- RT: Okay. They had Civic Auditorium, and it was very close. Pretty close. Civic Auditorium had parking, and next to parking was George's Inn.

MK: I don't know if maybe you were too young or not, but what do you know about how your dad got George's Inn?

RT: Seems like my parents got into *tanomoshi* and they had in mind to run a restaurant/bar almost similar to Kaimukī Inn. They were looking around for a good location, and finally found a place close to Civic Auditorium. I had no knowledge whatsoever when it came to work in a bar. But, my parents were patiently showing me how to work. That's when I found out they were wonderful partners when it came to run a restaurant. They were willing to take a chance with whatever they had.

MK: That was while you were still at 'Iolani?

RT: 'Iolani. I made twenty that year. My parents didn't buy the property and the building. That was just the business and renting. My parents took over Royal Palm Inn with the existing condition and the employees.

MK: And who owned the Royal Palm Inn?

RT: I don't know who was the owner.

MK: Nowadays people refer to your father's restaurant as George's Inn. How did Royal Palm Inn become George's Inn?

RT: My father's name is Taru. Taro, sometimes. But people used to call him "George" from way back. His name was George when he worked at Kaimukī Inn bar, and since he enjoyed drinking, he was popular and liked by his friends. News spread fast, "George opened his bar." George's Inn was the most appropriate name.

MK: I know you told me it was located near the Civic Auditorium. What else was near there, that neighborhood?

RT: Tanabe Store (Tanabe Superette after relocated), Ogawa Drugstore, a Chinese grocery or market, excuse me if it's wrong, Daimaru, an old but cozy place for few people to get in and drink, an old little Japanese store with a shave ice machine on the front window and a small showcase with *manju* and *mochi*. Most of these were old wooden structures. Around Civic Auditorium area, there were Ikeda Music Store, barber shop, Precision Radio, service station.

MK: Were there any other restaurants nearby?

RT: They used to have Tasty Inn about a block away. Mitsuba Okazu was right around of the corner of George's Inn. They had about two little eating places on Sheridan Street.

MK: And a theater?

RT: Yeah, seems like they had one on Sheridan, but no longer running. They had one on the corner of Beretania and Ke'eaumoku.

MK: And how about residences? Were there homes around that area?

RT: Yes, right behind George's Inn, there were lots of houses and cottages crammed in the back area. Many years ago, it used to be Rose Garden Hotel, with royal palm trees

growing on the entrance. A building with a garage attached came up in front of the old hotel and whoever started a bar named it Royal Palm Inn because of that palm trees.

MK: So did he own those rentals, too?

RT: No, but later. Mr. Yoshino, our accountant acquired the property from South King Street to Young Street for about hundred thousand dollars and he turned around and offered half of the property for hundred thousand dollars to my parents. That was quite a decision to make. Mr. Yoshino could be collecting George's Inn's rent or buying the property. That's when my parents bought half and the boundary went through the old houses. Whatever houses were on our property became rental income for George's Inn.

MK: I was wondering who were the clients or customers at George's Inn in the early days when your dad started . . .

RT: When he just opened? Well, he made a lot of friends at Kaimukī Inn. I feel kind of bad, because he told all the customers, "I'm opening."

(Laughter)

Well, customers had to see and decide on their own. We had a lot of customers from Meadow Gold. On paydays, my father used to cash checks for them, so they can drink. The bar used to be full with uniforms. Same thing with customers from Hawaiian Electric, Telephone Company, Board of Water Supply, Gas Company, bus drivers, and construction workers. All the events in Civic Auditorium gave us good business.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: This is side two of interview number two with Mr. Richard Takara.

So, you were just saying that sometimes the wives of Dairymen customers, Meadow Gold customers would come in to. . . .

RT: Some wives enjoyed drinking with their husbands, but some came looking to get their husbands home. (Laughs) That was especially paydays. There were lots of steady customers. When Civic Auditorium had any events, we had full, full house and mad house. My father used to hire extra bartenders behind the bar. All the beer bottles and cans were opened in a huge tray for fast service. Waitress just pick up from the tray and pay as they go. Fast, fast, fast. So meantime, bartenders had to watch the customers sitting on the bar, drinking. That was one thing my father was very alert, he wanted to make sure nobody was waiting for drinks. Make sure before they almost through, you just say, "Another one? Another one?" Keep on going. "Another one, one more, one more?" Waitress had to go around and around, and get their orders, and come back. Before the wrestling and after the wrestling were extra busy. I worked until my father said I can go home. Then I had to go home and study for the next day's class. My mother started to open the kitchen for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, not just *pūpū*.

MK: Oh, in the beginning it was a bar then?



- RT: Yeah. Just bar with *pūpū*. In no time, we had a little simple menu, went on increasing to regular, and variety of sandwiches.
- MK: What were the specialties that George's Inn, in the early days, was known for? Which foods?
- RT: Known for? Well, somehow it's—they had steak and lobster, most expensive ones. Hamburger steak was the main, because it can be used for meat loaf, meatballs, and it can be used for variety of sandwiches. Half-fried chicken was popular those days. One prepared entrée for the day was like, tripe stew Spanish-style, lamb curry, baked short ribs with pan gravy, *mahimahi* with Spanish sauce, stuffed cabbage with gravy, sweet sour pork spareribs with pineapple, it can go on and on.
- MK: Who did the cooking at George's Inn?
- RT: At the very beginning, only one cook was making only *pūpū* (french fries) and washing *pūpū* dishes. Later, my mother came in early to prepare entrées, soup of the day, toss green, fruit cocktail, but later she had the cook come in early so she could train him how to set up and prepare, cook the way she wanted according to the menu.
- MK: So you had the main cook, dishwasher, kitchen helper. . . .
- RT: Yeah. They had more kitchen staff and my father wanted more variety in *pūpūs*, because that was drawing the crowd and they drank more.
- MK: What did he serve as *pūpū*?
- RT: French fries became standard for every day and added other varieties changing every day, like *lomi* salmon, *sashimi*, cheese crackers, *kālua* pig with cabbage, *chow fun*, chicken wings, boiled peanuts.
- MK: You mentioned that your father really pushed the *pūpū* idea. Was having *pūpūs* with drinks a customary thing at other places, too, at that time?
- RT: No, not every place. Some bar owners didn't like the idea. Usually, lot of places charged for every *pūpū*. Some places had *pūpū* menu out. Giving away free *pūpū* was very costly. My father used *aku* and *'ahi* from what do they call that place? Fish bidding place.
- MK: Oh, the fish auction?
- RT: Auction, yeah. My father had connection to get fish. He used to buy the whole fish and our cook used to cut into slabs and put it in the ice box for *sashimi*. My father wanted to serve *sashimi* from the very first drink ordered.
- MK: And in those days, did you folks have cocktail waitresses?
- RT: They all looked like ordinary waitresses because they had white uniform with white shoes. Once in awhile, everybody had *aloha* attire so the women had long *mu'umu'u*. Customers were welcomed to sit wherever they wanted and the waitresses were capable to serve food and cocktails.
- MK: How many tables did the restaurant side eventually have?

RT: We had dining room and bar area, but it didn't matter, customers sat wherever they wanted. At the very beginning, I don't think we had booths. There were green tables with green stools. Tables were easy to move for combining or for individual use. For extra chairs, we had lots of folding metal chairs. When it got very busy and no tables, people just stood standing for a fast drink.

MK: And what events really drew the customers?

RT: Wrestling, boxing, amateur boxing, concerts, roller-derby, basketball, Japanese entertainers used very often.

MK: So in terms of business then, was business more busy in the evenings, rather than during the day?

RT: Evenings of course. After I finished my high school, I went UH [University of Hawai'i], but I got drafted. And I served in Japan and Korea. My parents worked hard. That's when Jane and Helen were helping.

MK: What did your sisters do there?

RT: When they made their age twenty, they helped as waitresses. My brother, Eddie, helped also. When he got married his wife worked at George's Inn, too.

MK: What kind of work? What role? What was her job?

RT: Eddie's wife's name is Roberta. Roberta worked as a waitress. A very hardworking girl. She used to type menu for the next day. Roberta's working shift was day, while he took care their children; Eddie worked night shift and Roberta was home with their children.

MK: And what kind of work did Eddie do at George's Inn?

RT: He worked with his father. And was a bartender, cashier, and he also helped as a bouncer. When time permitted he used to go to the fish auction.

MK: You were telling me previously that you were drafted, you were sent to Japan and Korea, and you also got married?

RT: Yeah.

MK: In Japan?

RT: I was stationed in Japan, North Camp Drake, and was qualified for language school to learn Korean. Those days, Korean and Chinese bilingualists were in demand, so I was happy. While I was stationed there, I visited my school, met my schoolteacher, Maeda-sensei, I went to Okinawa to see my grandma, I went to see the two Takara families in Tokyo. Oh, I went to the house where we used to live. And I met my wife. Those are the days, those fond memories of my life I want to cherish.

I served in Korea as a Korean interpreter for about a year and extended one year to get married and take my wife home.

MK: So you were back in Honolulu . . .



RT: With my wife.

MK: With your wife . . .

RT: Yeah.

MK: In 1956, about.

RT: Yeah, '56. And my wife was five months pregnant. Good thing my mother had a house rented and furnished for us. It was a one-bedroom duplex house for fifty dollars. It was on Rycroft and Ke'eaumoku, just few minutes walk to George's Inn.

"Come right now."

"Okay."

"You can go home now, and then if it gets busy, I'm going to call you."

And this went on and on and on, and I used to say, "Oh no, this is not life." (Laughs) I was so used to the military life. "We need a family life with at least a day off." Oh, my father used to get mad with me. After work, I was always on the standby to call in for giving hand.

MK: So when you came back to Honolulu, what was your job or work at George's Inn?

RT: First thing I was supposed to know how the kitchen was operated. How to set up everything before the other kitchen staffs show up.

Before I left to the service, I didn't work in the kitchen at all. This was my first time to get in the kitchen. I started with my mother. Say, "Okay, you come in the morning."

Say, "Okay."

I went in the morning before the place opens. She was over there in the morning when I got there, somewhere around seven-thirty or eight o'clock. The rice was already cooked, and the grill was on for breakfast. Then, she gave me coffee, and say, "You want toast?"

I say, "Oh, okay, toast."

"You want anything for breakfast?"

I said, "No, 'nough," because I had breakfast with my wife at home. And then Jane used to come right after that because she used to work at American Security Bank. My mother made tuna sandwich for her lunch. I noticed she opened this morning's fresh delivered bread for the sandwich, which I felt my mother cared for her, although she worked outside of George's Inn. She had coffee with us before she left to work. She was dressed very nice, and I thought, I am about to start my life in this kitchen.

My mother taught me step by step how to set up everything in the kitchen from gravy, soup, mashed potato, and prepare entrée for the day. She watched me as I followed her instructions, which pot to use, where to get the prepared ingredients from the ice box, what kind of utensils to use, what kind of seasonings to use, and how much.

"Now you taste, and how you like?" I tasted, and didn't know what to say, so she tasted and said, "Maybe just a little more salt." Then I tasted again, "Ah," I found the difference.

MK: So she taught you how to cook then?

RT: Yeah.

MK: Was that the first time you had to cook?

RT: Yeah. Especially in large quantity. There were mistakes here and there, once in awhile, like pouring tomato sauce into clam chowder. "No, no, no. That's okay, that's all right. We can always change the menu. We're going to have New England clam chowder for the day."

MK: How did she teach you how to cook? Measuring, or just showing? How did you learn. . . .

RT: Cooking was not like going through a recipe book. We worked on volume, using huge pots and utensils. She usually stood by and instructed me what to do, and sometimes I had to watch her how she was using the utensils to stir, how to use the ladle to remove the oil from whatever we were cooking. Work was not done one at a time. We had to put the stove on simmer (low heat) and work on preparing mashed potato, hot vegetables, and entrée of the day. Usually, I watched her portion she used, and watched how much seasonings she was using and showed me how it tasted. Then the next time, I seasoned for her to taste.

MK: So actually taught you, she taught you how. It wasn't like you just stood by her and watched and you learned. *Minarai*, she taught you.

RT: And then later on she taught me how to make pie crust. It looked easy how she worked with her hands, but soon I felt I had gifted hands from my mother. I was baking lemon meringue, custard, pumpkin, and apple pies. And later, banana cream, chocolate cream, and coconut cream pies.

Later, she showed me how to make bread, dinner rolls. We had a bread dough mixer, and she showed me how the lukewarm water was supposed to be. Getting the ingredients in, I was using a big scooper for the bread flour. "Little by little, gradually, not one time," as she watched me. Then she let feel the dough, and she say, "This is the texture it's supposed to be." We let it rise, mix, let it rise again and flip over a pre-floured board. Flour over and use the rolling pin and use this cutter for cut. She showed me how to cut the dough with that Vienna sausage cut . . .

MK: Can?

RT: . . . can. Say, "Cut all this like that." And then you brush little melted butter on each one, and then you fold, fold and line up in the greased pan, all that, one by one. Doesn't mean that the first day I knew everything (MK chuckles), few times more. A lot of things I learned from my mother, not from my father.

MK: So your mother was the primary cook then, in the beginning, and then when you came back, she trained you to cook and bake, and do all those things.

- RT: Yes, but for my mother, kitchen was not all. About ten o'clock, cooks and dishwasher would come in to take over. My mother goes to the front to set up the front (dining room and bar). Set up the cash register, took care the books, banking, ordering when salesman comes around. Soon, waitresses come in and start wiping tables and setting napkin holders, salt and peppers. My mother took care the front, sometimes until ten o'clock in the evening. My father used to show up around three or four o'clock to work.
- MK: So what was his role in the restaurant? What was his work in the restaurant?
- RT: He didn't do much in the restaurant and kitchen, but he always reminded the cooks to prepare and have enough *pūpūs*. He took care the front. He was very alert. His eyes were in every direction and service was the main thing. And he had his certain spots to stand, so he could get a view in general.
- MK: So how long were your hours? From what time to what time were you working?
- RT: Morning till afternoon, and then come back before the dinner crowd. It was almost too often working until late in the evening. With no day off.
- MK: So when you say there's a crowd, how many people would be in the restaurant and the bar?
- RT: Customer? Full house. It means jam pack. At the peak hour, outside George's Inn, there were full of people heading toward Civic. I don't know how to describe the mob.
- MK: Yeah.
- RT: Full house. Full, full house means waitresses had hard time going through the crowds to take orders. We had about twelve high stools on the bar, people were in between the stools with friends, drinking. Tables were all full. People just stood with drinks in their hand. It gradually slow down, and that's when we have to, first thing, catch up with refill, bring more beers from the cooler, fill up the ice bin. Around ten o'clock as soon as Civic is over, the crowd came right back, and full house again.
- MK: And how many were there helping you and your mother in the back in the kitchen?
- RT: During the busy hours, my mother used to work in the front as cashier but never stood only there. She was going around taking drink orders from customers to customers, too. In the kitchen, we had a dishwasher and a cook lady, Mrs. Kaneshiro. I was in the kitchen to help. Most of the orders came from the dining room. I worked until he said, "Okay you can go," because I had an experience going home before he said anything. Working every day, no day off, strange, nobody complained. I was getting to be the rotten one, once in awhile or the troublemaker.
- MK: And then you mentioned earlier that your sisters worked there as waitresses.
- RT: Later on, my oldest sister, Nancy's family moved to Honolulu, and she started to help as a waitress, and her husband worked at Times.
- MT: And your other sisters? One worked at the bank . . .
- RT: My parents asked Jane to come back and help George's Inn. So she quit the bank and had to work full time.

MK: At the restaurant.

RT: Yeah. Full time. My sister, Helen, and my brother, Eddie, and me, we all worked full time. Of course, my parents worked seven days a week without a day off. I assumed all restaurant owners' families were alike.

MK: And who was doing like the managing of the restaurant?

RT: My parents, of course. It is sad to look back with my age in the seventies. With all the struggle during those days, a strange survival instinct kept me going. We had no say in those days as far as the hours we worked, and how this business should be.

MK: And how many employees were there in addition to the family?

RT: Working in the kitchen practically all my restaurant life, I had no opportunity to feel like a boss, going through the books, checking the time cards, that was left for the ones [who] worked in the front. Since nightshift was busy, there were extra bartenders and a bartendress inside of the bar. In fact, my father was in there, too. Sometimes, they had two bouncers. Sometimes Eddie worked as bouncer. We had lot of fights among customers, especially with shuffleboard, pinball machine. Later on they had pool table, and that was just as bad. They had to call the police to stop the fights. Sometimes, it was more exciting than going to Civic to see boxing. That probably drove my father to heavy drinking. He used to kill one bottle like nothing for the night.

MK: And then you mentioned that with the customers you had some problems when they were playing the shuffleboard or the pool.

RT: We had to bar them out. "Bar them out" means you don't come back no more because you're a troublemaker.

MK: How would you do that? Identify the person and when they come in the door, you asked them to leave?

RT: Yes, the doorman would not let him in. Unbelievable, honest, my mother handled drunk[ards] and troublemakers out of the door with her extraordinary strength with some bruise sometimes. Men had respect for ladies those days.

MK: I was wondering, which side was more important to George's Inn? The bar or the restaurant side?

RT: Money-maker was the liquor.

MK: The bar.

RT: The bar. Johnson & Buscher Inc. at one time, gave my father a plaque, awarding him for selling the most barrels of draft beer in Hawai'i. In the walk-in cooler, they always had barrels of draft beers on hand. And they always had spares to exchange when it got empty.

MK: And then also, for entertainment, in addition to the games, the pool and the shuffleboard, what other things could your patrons do, like music or dancing?

- RT: Jukebox, yeah? And another coin operated intercom music box. The operator played whatever selections you ask for and announced dedications if requested.
- MK: And then, I was wondering, your patrons there, I guess they're sports fans, yeah? They're coming from the Civic [Auditorium]. Did George's Inn develop a reputation sort of like as a sports bar then?
- RT: Not really. Now and then, some well-known wrestlers used to show up with their families. During the roller derby season, the skaters used to show up. But at one time, we used to have lots of customer fights which made it very entertaining for some people.
- MK: When Civic Auditorium closed, how did that effect George's Inn?
- RT: Oh, it affected a lot. And the one-way traffic, too.
- MK: You mean Beretania [Street] being one-way?
- RT: No, King Street became one-way, and business slumped drastically. That's when I had my mother renovate the place. Not too long after that, this investment opportunity came along which was Taira's investment scheme. That investment went more than five years, but it collapsed and my mother took a big loss. I was myself in that scheme and took a loss, too.

I had my own *tanomoshi* going on those days, but slowly it started to get risky to continue, so I decided to discontinue *tanomoshi*. Business was slow, and we struggled somehow to pull through.

My mother started to collect Social Security when she came to the age sixty-five. But, she continued to help during the busy lunch hours.

Looking at George's Inn, our surrounding businesses, George's Inn was forced to go through renovation. A face lift to change its image from bar to a family eating place.

I thought this was the chance to get this place going. My mother agreed to this renovation, and we both signed for the bank loan.

We completed the renovation as planned. Business went on but I had problem paying my rent for George's Inn to my mother and paying the mortgage monthly. But business went on struggling.

- MK: So eventually what happened to George's Inn?

- RT: Now and then I used to ask my mother for help, so she used to bring couple of thousand dollars from her bank savings. I used to work from morning breakfast hour, lunch hour, dinner hour, closed the kitchen and the dining room at ten o'clock, scrub and wash down kitchen floor, and stay until the bar closed. I was working from opening and stayed until closing without going home. No matter what, I worked. Even janitor's job and maintenance were on me to cut cost. It was getting close to ten years of struggle from the time we had renovation done.

Just around that time, my sisters told my mother, "You know, for your age, you just not gonna let George's Inn run like the way it is now. Why don't you settle this, sell the

place, and clear off this?" Because it was all under my mother's name. Ownership, property owner, everything. "If anything happens to her it's better now to clear off."

So my mother decided. She came to me. She said, "I'm thinking now of selling this George's Inn. What do you think?"

I said, "Yeah, but can you make sure that you clear the mortgage for me? Because I am liable to carry on the mortgage. She agreed on the mortgage so we had a realtor to take care.

MK: And what year was that?

RT: When was that? Somewhere around 1987.

MK: As my last question, having been in the business for so long as a young adult and then adult, all through till the [19]80s, what are your feelings about having been in the restaurant business?

RT: From the year I made twenty, that's 1950, maybe I spend three years in the service, but other than that I spent my days and nights working in George's Inn. There are more bitter memories than fond, pleasant ones. I worked hard but never seen enjoyment in my work. The last renovation for George's Inn looked just the way I dreamed for, but I struggled with the mortgage which I was liable. "Thank you mom, for clearing my mortgage." I am happy it's all over. I want to forget everything.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 40-18-2-02; SIDE ONE

MK: Anyway, you were just telling me the morning routine where your wife would come in first, then you would come in, and if you can continue from there.

RT: Okay.

MK: So you would come in, and. . . .

RT: When I come in, she had the rice cooked, coffee's ready and the grill is on for me. I take over the kitchen and she goes to the front. About three waitresses come in one by one and they all have work to do like setting up tables, check the toss salad and fruit cocktails, beverages, and mean time serving breakfast. We had customers from First Hawaiian Bank, from agriculture and police department, and other business office workers. When the cook and dishwasher come in, I had to prepare gravy, soup, mashed potato, and entrées. All these preparations were done while handling breakfast orders. The bartendress comes in about eleven o'clock, and the telephone starts ringing for the usual takeout orders. We had no overheads in any way. My mother usually came to just help during the lunch busy hour.

MK: Until the very end your mom was still involved?

RT: Yes, as a owner. She was the sole owner of the property, building and the business.

- MK: You know, because it was a family business all the way through, what are your feelings about a family-run restaurant?
- RT: Not good at all. As the oldest son, somehow I was the rotten one. I should know that I am living in America.
- MK: And could I have just one more question then? Since you were in the restaurant business so long, especially from '56 on till the end, what do you think were the main changes you had to adapt to during those years in the business?
- RT: I was not in the restaurant business. I felt I was working in a restaurant, hopefully, with no other jobs to turn to. I couldn't do any changes, I had no saying, neither the rest of the siblings. The best thing was to work as they pleased. That's when my parents were living.

After my father passed away, all the commotions happened among the siblings and one by one left George's Inn. End up with me alone, me, myself, and running it was very hard. I almost didn't have enough time to sleep. Working till midnight, closing, clean, and then coming home and coming back to work in the early morning, was going over and over, and pretty soon I said, "Okay, nobody going tell me what to do. I'm gonna close Sunday." So that Sunday was clean-up day. I used to shampoo the carpet, cleaning up the stove, cleaning the icebox, and getting prepared for the next day. Was a lot of work over there on the closing day. And, I used to close on holidays, too. Employees were happy about that. Business was hard. I didn't want my family to go through any longer. My daughter? No, I don't want her to work and help me.

- MK: It's a hard life.
- RT: Yeah, hard life. It's much easier to work for somebody, rather than a family-run business. I am happy to be out of George's Inn, I never went out to look for jobs handling food. My first job was in Dole Cannery as Japanese-speaking customer service for one year. I got more confidence with my Japanese, so I moved on to Waikiki. I was accepted at Duty Free. I am taking advantage of my Japanese, Korean, Chinese language I acquired in the past.
- MK: I'm going to end it here.

END OF INTERVIEW



# **The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawai'i**

**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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